Theodosius the Great

(19 January 379 – 17 January 395)

BRIEFING

Theodosius I (Ancient Greek: Θεοδόσιος *Theodosios*; 11 January 347 – 17 January 395), also known as **Theodosius the Great**, was Roman emperor from 379 to 395. He won two civil wars and was instrumental in establishing the Nicene Creed as the orthodox doctrine for Nicene Christianity. Theodosius was the last emperor to rule the entire Roman Empire before its administration was permanently split between the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. He ended the Gothic War (376–382) with terms disadvantageous to the empire, with the Goths remaining within Roman territory but as nominal allies with political autonomy.

Born in Hispania, Theodosius was the son of a high-ranking general of the same name, Count Theodosius, under whose guidance he rose through the ranks of the Roman army. Theodosius held independent command in Moesia in 374, where he had some success against the invading Sarmatians. Not long afterwards, he was forced into retirement, and his father was executed under obscure circumstances. Theodosius soon regained his position following a series of intrigues and executions at Emperor Gratian's court. In 379, after the eastern Roman emperor Valens was killed at the Battle of Adrianople against the Goths, Gratian appointed Theodosius as a successor with orders to take charge of the military emergency. The new emperor's resources and depleted armies were not sufficient to drive the invaders out; in 382 the Goths were allowed to settle south of the Danube as autonomous allies of the empire. In 386, Theodosius signed a treaty with the Sasanian Empire which partitioned the long-disputed Kingdom of Armenia and secured a durable peace between the two powers.

Theodosius was a strong adherent of the Christian doctrine of consubstantiality and an opponent of Arianism. He convened a council of bishops at the First Council of Constantinople in 381, which confirmed the former as orthodoxy and the latter as a heresy. Although Theodosius interfered little in the functioning of traditional pagan cults and appointed non-Christians to high offices, he failed to prevent or punish the damaging of several Hellenistic temples of classical antiquity, such as the Serapeum of Alexandria, by Christian zealots. During his earlier reign, Theodosius ruled the eastern provinces, while the west was overseen by the emperors Gratian and Valentinian II, whose sister he married. According to historian Andreas Schwarcz, the marriage was specifically arranged to consolidate Theodosius' political and military power. Theodosius sponsored several measures to improve his capital and main residence, Constantinople, most notably his expansion of the Forum Tauri, which became the biggest public square known in antiquity. Theodosius marched west twice, in 388 and 394, after both Gratian and Valentinian had been killed, to defeat the two pretenders, Magnus Maximus and Eugenius, who rose to replace them. Theodosius's final victory in September 394 made him ruler of the entire empire; he died a few months later and was succeeded by his two sons, Arcadius in the eastern half of the empire and Honorius in the west.

Theodosius was said to have been a diligent administrator, austere in his habits, merciful, and a devout Christian. For centuries after his death, Theodosius was regarded as a champion of Christian orthodoxy who decisively stamped out paganism. Modern scholars tend to see this as an interpretation of history by Christian writers more than an accurate representation of actual history. He is fairly credited with presiding over a revival in classical art that some historians have termed a "Theodosian renaissance". Although his pacification of the Goths secured peace for the Empire during his lifetime, their status as an autonomous entity within Roman borders caused problems for succeeding emperors. Theodosius has also received criticism for defending his own dynastic interests at the cost of two civil wars. His two sons proved weak and incapable rulers, and they presided over a period of foreign invasions and court intrigues, which heavily weakened the empire. However, the descendants of Theodosius ruled the Roman world for the next six decades, and the east–west division endured until the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the late 5th century.

BACKGROUND

Theodosius was born in Hispania on 11 January, probably in the year 347. His father of the same name, Count Theodosius, was a successful and high-ranking general (*magister equitum*) under the western Roman emperor Valentinian I, and his mother was called Thermantia. The family appear to have been minor landed aristocrats in Hispania, although it is not clear if this social status went back several generations or if Theodosius the Elder was simply awarded land there for his military service. Their roots to Hispania were nevertheless probably long-standing, since various relatives of the future emperor Theodosius are likewise attested as being from there, and Theodosius himself was ubiquitously associated in the ancient literary sources and panegyrics with the image of fellow Spanish-born emperor Trajan – though he never again visited the peninsula after becoming emperor.

Very little is recorded of the upbringing of Theodosius. The 5th-century author Theodoret claimed the future emperor grew up and was educated in his Iberian homeland, but his testimony is unreliable. One modern historian instead thinks Theodosius must have grown up among the army, participating in his father's campaigns throughout the provinces, as was customary at the time for families with a tradition of military service. One source says he received a decent education and developed a particular interest in history, which Theodosius then valued as a guide to his own conduct throughout life.

CAREER

Theodosius is first attested accompanying his father to Britain on his expedition in 368–369 to suppress the "Great Conspiracy", a concerted Celtic and Germanic invasion of the island provinces. After probably serving in his father's staff on further campaigns, Theodosius received his first independent command by 374 when he was appointed the *dux* (commanding officer) of the province of Moesia Prima in the Danube. In the autumn of 374, he successfully repulsed an incursion of Sarmatians on his sector of the frontier and forced them into submission. Not long afterwards, however, under mysterious circumstances, Theodosius's father suddenly fell from imperial favor and was executed, and the future emperor felt compelled to retire to his estates in Hispania.

Although these events are poorly documented, historians usually attribute this fall from grace to the machinations of a court faction led by Maximinus, a senior civilian official. According to another theory, the future emperor Theodosius lost his father, his military post, or both, in the purges of high officials that resulted from the accession of the 4-year-old emperor Valentinian II in November 375. Theodosius's period away from service in Hispania, during which he was said to have received threats from those responsible for his father's death, did not last long, however, as Maximinus, the probable culprit, was himself removed from power around April 376 and then executed. The emperor Gratian immediately began replacing Maximinus and his associates with relatives of Theodosius in key government positions, indicating the family's full rehabilitation, and by 377 Theodosius himself had regained his command against the Sarmatians.

Theodosius's renewed term of office seems to have gone uneventfully, until news arrived that the eastern Roman emperor, Valens, had been killed at the Battle of Adrianople in August 378 against invading Goths. The disastrous defeat left much of Rome's military leadership dead, discredited, or barbarian in origin, to the result that Theodosius, notwithstanding his own modest record, became the establishment's choice to replace Valens and assume control of the crisis. With the begrudging consent of the western emperor Gratian, Theodosius was formally invested with the purple by a council of officials at Sirmium on 19 January 379.

REIGN

Gothic War (376 - 382)

The immediate problem facing Theodosius upon his accession was how to check the bands of Goths that were laying waste to the Balkans, with an army that had been severely depleted of manpower following the debacle at Adrianople. The western emperor Gratian, who seems to have provided only little immediate assistance, surrendered to Theodosius control of the praetorian prefecture of Illyricum for the duration of the conflict, giving his new colleague full charge the war effort. Theodosius implemented stern and desperate recruiting measures, resorting to the conscription of farmers and miners. Punishments were instituted for harboring deserters and furnishing unfit recruits, and even self-mutilation did not exempt men from service. Theodosius also admitted large numbers of non-Roman auxiliaries into the army, even Gothic deserters from beyond the Danube. Some of these foreign recruits were exchanged with more reliable Roman garrison troops stationed in Egypt.

In the second half of 379, Theodosius and his generals, based at Thessalonica, won some minor victories over individual bands of raiders. However, they suffered at least one serious defeat in 380, which was blamed on the treachery of the new barbarian recruits. During the autumn of 380, a life-threatening illness, from which Theodosius recovered, prompted him to request baptism. Some obscure victories were recorded in official sources around this time, however, and, in November 380, the military situation was found to be sufficiently stable for Theodosius to move his court to Constantinople. There, the emperor enjoyed a propaganda victory when, in January 381, he received the visit and submission of a minor Gothic leader, Athanaric. By this point, however, Theodosius seems to have no longer believed that the Goths could be completely ejected from Roman territory. After Athanaric died that very same month, the emperor gave him a funeral with full honors, impressing his entourage and signaling to the enemy that the Empire was disposed to negotiate terms. During the campaigning season of 381, reinforcements from Gratian drove the Goths out of the Diocese of Macedonia and Thessaly into the Diocese of Thrace, while, in the latter sector, Theodosius or one of his generals repulsed an incursion by a group of Sciri and Huns across the Danube.

Following negotiations which likely lasted at least several months, the Romans and Goths finally concluded a settlement on 3 October 382. In return for military service to Rome, the Goths were allowed to settle some tracts of Roman land south of the Danube. The terms were unusually favorable to the Goths, reflecting the fact that they were entrenched in Roman territory and had not been driven out. Namely, instead of fully submitting to Roman authority, they were allowed to remain autonomous under their own leaders, and thus remaining a strong, unified body. The Goths now settled within the Empire would largely fight for the Romans as a national contingent, as opposed to being fully integrated into the Roman forces.

According to the *Chronicon Paschale*, Theodosius celebrated his *quinquennalia* on 19 January 383 at Constantinople; on this occasion he raised his eldest son Arcadius to co-emperor (*augustus*). Sometime in 383, Gratian's wife Constantia died.[60] Gratian remarried, wedding Laeta, whose father was a *consularis* of Roman Syria. Early 383 saw the acclamation of Magnus Maximus as emperor in Britain and the appointment of Themistius as *praefectus urbi* in Constantinople. On 25 August 383, according to the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, Gratian was killed at Lugdunum (Lyon) by Andragathius, the *magister equitum* of the rebel emperor during the rebellion of Magnus Maximus. Constantia's body arrived in Constantinople on 12 September that year and was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles on 1 December. Gratian was deified as Latin: *Divus Gratianus*, lit. 'the Divine Gratian'.

Theodosius, unable to do much about Maximus due to ongoing military inadequacy, opened negotiations with the Persian emperor Shapur III (r. 383–388) of the Sasanian Empire. According to the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, Theodosius received in Constantinople an embassy from them in 384.

In an attempt to curb Maximus's ambitions, Theodosius appointed Flavius Neoterius as the Praetorian Prefect of Italy.[63] In the summer of 384, Theodosius met his co-emperor Valentinian II in northern Italy. Theodosius brokered a peace agreement between Valentinian and Magnus Maximus which endured for several years.

Theodosius I was based in Constantinople, and according to Peter Heather, wanted, "for his own dynastic reasons (for his two sons each eventually to inherit half of the empire), refused to appoint a recognized counterpart in the west. As a result he was faced with rumbling discontent there, as well as dangerous usurpers, who found plentiful support among the bureaucrats and military officers who felt they were not getting a fair share of the imperial cake."

Middle Reign

Theodosius's second son Honorius was born on 9 December 384 and titled *nobilissimus puer* (or *nobilissimus iuvenis*). The death of Aelia Flaccilla, Theodosius's first wife and the mother of Arcadius, Honorius, and Pulcheria, occurred by 386. She died at Scotumis in Thrace and was buried at Constantinople, her funeral oration delivered by Gregory of Nyssa. A statue of her was dedicated in the Byzantine Senate. In 384 or 385, Theodosius's niece Serena was married to the *magister militum*, Stilicho.

In the beginning of 386, Theodosius's daughter Pulcheria also died. That summer, more Goths were defeated, and many were settled in Phrygia. According to the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, a Roman triumph over the Gothic Greuthungi was then celebrated at Constantinople. The same year, work began on the great triumphal column in the Forum of Theodosius in Constantinople, the Column of Theodosius. The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* records that on 19 January 387, Arcadius celebrated his *quinquennalia* in Constantinople. By the end of the month, there was an uprising or riot in Antioch (modern Antakya). The Roman–Persian Wars concluded with the signing of the Peace of Acilisene with Persia. By the terms of the agreement, the ancient Kingdom of Armenia was divided between the powers.

By the end of the 380s, Theodosius and the court were in Milan and northern Italy had settled down to a period of prosperity. Peter Brown says gold was being made in Milan by those who owned land as well as by those who came with the court for government service. Great landowners took advantage of the court's need for food, "turning agrarian produce into gold", while repressing and misusing the poor who grew it and brought it in. According to Brown, modern scholars link the decline of the Roman empire to the avarice of the rich of this era. He quotes Paulinus of Milan as describing these men as creating a court where "everything was up for sale". In the late 380s, Ambrose, the bishop of Milan took the lead in opposing this, presenting the need for the rich to care for the poor as "a necessary consequence of the unity of all Christians". This led to a major development in the political culture of the day called the “advocacy revolution of the later Roman empire". This revolution had been fostered by the imperial government, and it encouraged appeals and denunciations of bad government from below. However, Brown adds that, "in the crucial area of taxation and the treatment of fiscal debtors, the late Roman state [of the 380s and 390s] remained impervious to Christianity".

Civil War

The peace with Magnus Maximus was broken in 387, and Valentinian escaped to the east with Justina, reaching Thessalonica (Thessaloniki) in summer or autumn 387 and appealing to Theodosius for aid; Valentinian II's sister Galla was then married to the eastern emperor at Thessalonica in late autumn. Theodosius may still have been in Thessalonica when he celebrated his *decennalia* on 19 January 388. Theodosius was consul for the second time in 388. Galla and Theodosius's first child, a son named Gratian, was born in 388 or 389. In summer 388, Theodosius recovered Italy from Magnus Maximus for Valentinian, and in June, the meeting of Christians deemed heretics was banned by Valentinian.

The armies of Theodosius and Maximus fought at the Battle of Poetovio in 388, which saw Maximus defeated. On 28 August 388 Maximus was executed. Now the *de facto* ruler of the Western empire as well, Theodosius celebrated his victory in Rome on 13 June 389 and stayed in Milan until 391, installing his own loyalists in senior positions including the new *magister militum* of the West, the Frankish general Arbogast. According to the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, Arbogast killed Flavius Victor (r. 384–388), Magnus Maximus's young son and co-emperor, in Gaul in August/September that year. *damnatio memoriae* was pronounced against them, and inscriptions naming them were erased.

The Massacre

The Massacre of Thessalonica (Thessaloniki) in Greece was a massacre of local civilians by Roman troops. The best estimate of the date is April of 390. The massacre was most likely a response to an urban riot that led to the murder of a Roman official. What most scholars, such as philosopher Stanislav Doležal, see as the most reliable of the sources is the *Historia ecclesiastica* written by Sozomen about 442; in it Sozomen supplies the identity of the murdered Roman official as Butheric, the commanding general of the field army in Illyricum (magister militum per Illyricum). According to Sozomen, a popular charioteer tried to rape a cup-bearer, (or possibly Butheric himself), and in response, Butheric arrested and jailed the charioteer. The populace demanded the chariot racer's release, and when Butheric refused, a general revolt rose up costing Butheric his life. Doležal says the name "Butheric" indicates he might have been a Goth, and that the general's ethnicity "could have been" a factor in the riot, but none of the early sources actually say so.

MASSACRE OF THESSALONICA

The **Massacre of Thessalonica** in Macedonia, Greece, was a massacre of local civilians by Roman troops which is believed to have occurred around 390. According to Sozomen, in June of that year, Butheric, a Roman general stationed in Thessalonica as a magister militum, was lynched in an urban riot by an angry mob in the circus after having a famous circus charioteer arrested for pederasty, and refusing the people's demand for his release, although, this is found in only one source. In response, Theodosius authorized his Gothic soldiers to punish the people of the city resulting in the killing of a large number of citizens when they were assembled in the city's hippodrome.

Modern historians have had difficulty discerning the details of the massacre and its aftermath, as there are no contemporaneous accounts of the event. Instead, the works of fifth-century church historians provide the earliest record of what happened. Many parts of these accounts contradict one another, and some are of questionable reliability. The pagan historians of late antiquity do not discuss the massacre at all. Scholars contend that most extant records portray events by focusing on the moral perspective rather than the historical and political details. This makes it difficult for modern historians to distinguish fact from legend. Nonetheless, most classicists accept at least the basic account of the massacre, although they continue to dispute when it happened, who was responsible for it, what motivated it, and what impact it had on subsequent events.

Most scholars agree that Emperor Theodosius the Great played at least some role in either ordering or permitting the massacre, although others contend that the soldiers simply got out of control. Historically, Theodosius took responsibility upon himself, and that is when Ambrose (339–397 AD), bishop of Milan, became involved. Ambrose was absent from court when these events took place, and though he was one of Theodosius' many counselors, he was not one of the consistory (Theodosius' closest advisory council). Ambrose got much of his information on Theodosius through an informant, and, after he was informed of events concerning the events at Thessalonica, Ambrose wrote Theodosius a letter stating the emperor needed to demonstrate repentance for the massacre, further adding that emperor Theodosius would be forbidden from receiving the Eucharist until he had done so. History indicates Theodosius chose to cooperate with Ambrose' requirement.

Historical Background

Theodosius I, also known as Theodosius the Great, became emperor in 379. Mark Hebblewhite, ancient historian at Macquarie University, explains that the emperor Valens had just died, along with much of the eastern army, at the 378 Battle of Adrianople leaving the empire exposed to the barbarian threat. Theodosius was 32 years old when he took the throne with years of military leadership experience already behind him, but circumstances in the empire were not in his favor. Boniface Ramsey says Roman society was becoming less urban centered and more rural as the great days of the cities were gone, the middle class was increasingly stressed, and the situation of the poor was dire. The Germanic threat and their incursions into Roman territory disturbed the peace of Roman society everywhere. Hebblewhite says Theodosius was a Latin speaking westerner and a Nicene Christian when he became ruler of the religiously mixed, Greek-speaking East, yet he still managed to leave an indelible mark on history. He was a man who radiated strength, writes Hebblewhite, who transformed his society through his personal desire to reunify the empire, and his desire to bring unity to a badly divided church.

Ambrose was invested as Bishop of Milan in 376 AD, the same year the 16-year-old Gratian became emperor. Paulinus records in his biography, *The Life of Ambrose*, that before Ambrose became a bishop, he was an elected official of the Roman government, a magistrate, and Governor of Aemilia-Liguria in northern Italy. In 374, the bishop of Milan, Auxentius died. Conflict in the diocese of Milan between the Nicene Christians and the Arians, and the probability of an uproar over who would be elected the next bishop of Milan, led Ambrose to take troops, go to the election site, and speak to the people. His address was interrupted by a call, "Ambrose, for bishop!" which was taken up by the whole assembly. At first he refused, and fled to a colleague's home, believing he was not suitable for the position, since he was not yet baptized. But Emperor Gratian wrote a letter praising the appropriateness of Rome appointing individuals who had demonstrated they were worthy, and Ambrose's host gave him up. Within a week, Ambrose was baptized, ordained and duly consecrated bishop of Milan. Neil B. McLynn, classics scholar at Oxford, writes that "The next four years would see Ambrose become ... a figure of empire-wide importance".

As bishop, he adopted an ascetic lifestyle, donated his money to the poor and his land to the church, excepting only what was required to make provision for his sister Marcellina. Ramsey characterizes Ambrose as a spiritual man whose public activities were guided by spiritual considerations, but who was also straightforward, practical, and fearless, epitomizing the self-confidence of the age in which he lived. Ramsey also describes him as accepting of different customs, adapting himself to whatever customs prevailed wherever he happened to be, and as a highly adept politician.

By the time of the Thessalonian affair, Ambrose had been a bishop for 16 years, and during his episcopate, had seen the death of three emperors before Theodosius. These produced significant political storms, yet Ambrose held his place using what McLynn calls his "considerable qualities [and] considerable luck" to survive. Theodosius had been emperor for 11 years, had temporarily settled the Gothic wars, won two civil wars, offering clemency afterwards, and weathered his own storms.

Description of Events

John Curran writes one description of events in *The Cambridge Ancient History*: "In 390, Butheric, the garrison commander of Illyricum which included Thessalonica, was lynched by a mob of citizens in a dispute over the detention of a charioteer. Theodosius decided that a clear demonstration of his anger was required and in April 390, when the citizens of Thessalonica had gathered in the circus of their town, the emperor’s troops were let loose. The slaughter was frightful; 7,000 men, women and children were massacred in three hours. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan withdrew in horror from the emperor’s court. He

denounced Theodosius' wickedness and banned him from receiving communion until he had repented. The emperor sought absolution and was readmitted to communion on Christmas day 390, after an eight-month penance".

Historian Daniel Washburn writes that several "key aspects of this sequence remain murky". Summarizing the core elements, he writes: "...the people of Thessalonica revolted, killing at least one public official. For this infraction, the empire struck back with a punishment that, intentionally or not, ended in a massacre. The saga continued as Bishop Ambrose of Milan in a famous letter rebuked the emperor Theodosius for his responsibility for the bloodshed. Additionally, Ambrose vowed to refuse him the Eucharist until the emperor exhibited proper remorse. The affair concluded when Theodosius accepted the bishop's terms of repentance". Washburn adds that the exact date of the massacre is unknown and disputed, but general consensus places it in the spring or summer of 390 AD.

Washburn's account is based on his belief that Sozomen gives the fullest account of the riot's origins. Sozomen wrote that a popular charioteer tried to rape a cup-bearer, (other sources say a male servant in a tavern or Butheric himself), and in response, Butheric arrested and jailed the charioteer. According to Sozomen, the populace demanded the chariot racer's release, and when Butheric refused, a general revolt rose up, costing Butheric his life. Sozomen is the only source for this story about the charioteer. The other sources do not include these or many of the other details that have become part of the legend: they do not say how strong the garrison was, or whether or not the garrison was composed of Gothic allies and the riot racially motivated, or even whether the "military officer" in question was, himself, a Goth. The sole source on who the officer was, is again, Sozomen, who supplies only enough information to identify Butheric as the commanding general of the field army in Illyricum (magister militum per Illyricum). Stanislav Doležal, philosopher at the University of South Bohemia, says the name "Butheric" indicates he might very well have been a Goth, and that the general's ethnicity "could have been" a factor in the riot, but none of the early sources actually say so.

Robert Frakes says this is all that can be safely assumed: "there was a riot, and some of the inhabitants [of Thessalonica] killed an important military officer".

Commentary

Many contemporary scholars, such as historian C. W. R. Larson, are skeptical of the story. There are a limited number of pagan histories from the period, but there is no mention of the Thessalonican massacre at all in those histories. The biggest problem, according to Stanley Lawrence Greenslade, is not the absence of information, it is that the story of the Massacre of Thessalonica moved into art and literature in the form of legend almost immediately.

Washburn says that determining what really happened at Thessalonica has "vexed" scholars, and McLynn says it is almost impossible to reconstruct. Stanislav Doležal says these problems begin with the sources not being contemporaneous; instead, they come from the fifth century church historians Sozomen, Theodoret the bishop of Cyrrhus, Socrates of Constantinople and Rufinus. Sozomen wrote *Historia ecclesiastica* around 442, which includes a detailed account of the events that is considered the most reliable. According to Doležal, Theodoret wrote the lengthiest but also the least reliable account. These events occurred within Rufinus' lifetime, but his *Historia ecclesiastica* (II,18) has only a short and somewhat confusing description, while Socrates makes no mention of it at all.

Paulinus, Ambrose' personal secretary, wrote a biography of Ambrose in the fifth century, *The Life of Ambrose* (*Vita Ambrosii*). In it, chapter 7 discusses the massacre, but exclusively from Ambrose' perspective. There are also two direct sources from Ambrose, but they include no description of the massacre. Augustine of Hippo, mentions the massacre in his fifth century work, *The City of God*, but only briefly. There are also 6 later histories, but they use the fifth-century works as sources, and as a result, are unable to add anything scholars see as dependable.

All these accounts are plausible, but they also had a method and purpose that makes Washburn question them: they were written "to evoke appreciation for ecclesial action and imperial piety". McLynn explains that this political event was quickly transformed in the Christian historiography of the time into a moral lesson where "the surviving sources always present the story... in the context of Theodosius' repentance". The second problem in attempting to interpret historical reliability is that these sources do not give a unified account, and in many respects, are mutually exclusive.

Theodosius was not in Thessalonica when the massacre occurred, the court was in Milan, and it is unclear whether he ordered or simply permitted the massacre or if the troops got out of control. Historian G. W. Bowersock, and authors Stephen Williams and Gerard Friell think that Theodosius ordered the massacre in an excess of "volcanic anger", "choler" and "wrath". McLynn also puts all the blame on the Emperor. Church historian Theodoret holds the emperor's temper accountable, saying:

> *The anger of the Emperor rose to the highest pitch, and he gratified his vindictive desire for vengeance by unsheathing the sword most unjustly and tyrannically against all, slaying the innocent and guilty alike. It is said seven thousand perished without any forms of law, and without even having judicial sentence passed upon them; but that, like ears of wheat in the time of harvest, they were alike cut down.*

Hebblewhite says "Butheric held a very senior military position...and his death represented a direct threat to the authority of the emperor", but Hebblewhite does not think Theodosius ordered the massacre in hasty anger, arguing instead that there was a time lapse between Butheric's death and the massacre of at least three months. Historian N. Q. King says the Emperor may very well have been angry at first, but he would not have made a decision until his anger had passed and he was thinking clearly. Doležal also argues for the unlikelihood of Theodosius ordering the massacre in a fit of rage. He references Peter Brown, who points to the empire's established process of decision making, which required the emperor "to listen to his ministers" before acting. Thessalonica was an important city populated largely by Nicene Christians, most of whom would have been totally innocent of the crime, and Theodosius and his advisors would have known that. In Doležal's view, Theodosius must have listened to advice from the counselors in Milan with him, but what advice he received is unclear.

> *Ambrose, Paulinus, Augustine and Theodoret, (but not Rufinus or Sozomen) either imply or openly declare that the Emperor was somehow misled or duped in his decision by his officials. Ambrose is quite enigmatic, speaking of the "deceit of others", which caused the Emperor's guilt (deflevit in ecclesia publice peccatum suum, quod ei aliorum fraude obrepserat), while Paulinus only mentions some "secret negotiations of the officers with the Emperor", with which Augustine concurs, adding that Theodosius was "compelled by the urgency of certain of his intimates" (tumultu quorundam, qui ei cohaerebant). Sozomen knows of no such involvement, and the church historian Rufinus blamed no persons either, but a "demon" instead (subreptione quadam daemonis).*

One possible alternative explanation of events is that the troops lost control of the situation. Doležal writes: "Working on the conflicting sources, J. F. Matthews argues that the Emperor first tried to punish the city by selective executions... Peter Brown concurs: 'As it was, what was probably planned as a selective killing ... got out of hand'." According to Doležal, the massacre took place in the hippodrome and not all over the city. Sozomen is very specific, Doleźal adds, saying that in response to the riot, the soldiers made random arrests in the hippodrome to perform public executions there, and the citizenry objected. "The soldiers, realizing that they were surrounded by angry citizens, perhaps panicked and did what they were trained to: they forcibly cleared the hippodrome at the cost of several thousands of lives of local inhabitants. If Paulinus is right, the massacre lasted just over an hour, which is quite enough for such an operation".

McLynn says Theodosius was "unable to impose discipline upon the faraway troops [and] was compelled by the much-proclaimed myth of imperial omnipotence to accept [responsibility for the massacre himself]. The best face he could put upon the situation was of a hasty order countermanded too late". Doleźal acknowledges that, in letter 51, "Ambrose explicitly speaks of the massacre that "you yourself consider to be grave by revoking it too late" (et quod ipse sero revocando grave factum putasti)". This story may have been what Ambrose received from his informant, but Doleźal doubts that revocation of an imperial order is what actually happened.

One peculiarity of the story is that there is no record in any of the sources of a criminal investigation or other attempt to track down the culprits responsible for Butheric's death. Yet, Theodosius had carefully crafted a public image of an emperor with "a love of mankind". This inconsistency leads scholars like Wolfe Liebeschuetz and Carole Hill to call these events "unprecedented".

Aftermath

Scholars such as Boniface Ramsey think the massacre occurred during a period when Ambrose was banned from Theodosius' presence. As Ambrose himself says in letter 51, "I alone of all at your court have been stripped of the natural right of hearing, with the consequence that I have also been deprived of the power of speaking". Ramsey says Theodosius had become annoyed and sent Ambrose away when the emperor became aware Ambrose was being informed of "confidential decisions of the imperial consistory". Sozomen says Ambrose left the court claiming illness after he heard of the massacre. Whatever the reason for his absence, sources agree Ambrose hadn't been there to offer counsel when the riot and massacre occurred, nor was he present in its immediate aftermath.

At some point, Ambrose was informed of events. He responded by writing Theodosius a personal and private letter. According to McLynn, this still existing letter is "unusually" tactful for Ambrose, and it offers a different way for the emperor to "save face" and restore his image. Theodosius' concern for his public image being one of personal piety is well attested. Ambrose urges a semi-public penitence, using the example of David and Uriah, telling the emperor that he cannot give Theodosius communion until he demonstrates repentance for the massacre. Wolf Liebeschuetz says "Theodosius duly complied and came to church without his imperial robes, until Christmas, when Ambrose openly admitted him to communion".

From the time Edward Gibbon wrote his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Ambrose' action after–the–fact has been cited as an example of the church's dominance over the state in Antiquity. John Moorhead says these events are seen as "marking important victories of church over state". Alan Cameron observes that Theodosius' actions are often explained in terms of his falling under the dominating influence of Bishop Ambrose, which, Cameron says, is "often spoken of as though documented fact". Indeed, he says, "the assumption is so widespread it would be superfluous to cite authorities. But there is not a shred of evidence for Ambrose exerting any such influence over Theodosius".

Brown notes that Ambrose was not, in actuality, guaranteed success with his letter. He had been denied access to the emperor and denied other requests before. Brown says Ambrose was just one among many advisors, and Cameron says there is no evidence Theodosius favored him above anyone else. While McLynn asserts that the relationship between Theodosius and Ambrose was transformed into myth within a generation of their deaths, he also observes that the documents that reveal the relationship between Ambrose and Theodosius seem less about any purported personal friendship and more like negotiations between the institutions the two men represent: the Roman state and the Italian church.

Washburn says the image of the mitered prelate braced in the door of the cathedral in Milan blocking Theodosius from entering is a product of the imagination of Theodoret; he wrote of the events of 390 (probably sometime between 449 and 455) "using his own ideology to fill the gaps in the historical record". Peter Brown also says there was no dramatic encounter at the church door. McLynn states that "the encounter at the church door has long been known as a pious fiction". Ambrose advocated a course of action which avoided the kind of public humiliation Theodoret describes, and that is the course Theodosius chose.

Malcolm Errington has observed that "it is universally accepted that the incident happened in 390", but no source actually mentions a year. The only internal chronological reference in any source is in Theodoret who says Theodosius celebrated Christmas in the church eight months after Ambrose had demanded penance from him. In 388 Theodosius was in Italy only in October, November and December, and in 391, he was gone from Italy by July, but he was in Milan in both 389 and 390. Both Theodoret and Sozomen say the confrontation with Ambrose took place after Theodosius arrived in Milan, which seems to point to 389, except that Theodosius spent almost three months (June to September) in Rome in 389, making 390 more likely.

In August of 390, Theodosius is alleged to have issued a law ordering a 30-day wait between an order for capital punishment and its actual execution. Peter Brown says Theodosius wrote the law because he wanted to "take the wind out of Ambrose' sails" in the face of Ambrose' demand for penitence. MacMullen says that the law "represented the will of its bishop, Ambrose". According to Doležal, Theodosius was forced by Ambrose to enact the law before being allowed to "rejoin the Christian community". However, this is not in Ambrose's letter, and an inability to take the Eucharist would not prevent participation in worship or community. Doleźal explains that "the law in question seems to be CTh IX,40,13" which has come down to the modern day with a date of 18 August 382; it has been "inferred that the date is wrong and should be corrected to 390".

There is no consensus on whether this law was issued in 390, and if it was, whether it had anything to do with the massacre or not. Errington argues that the law was issued in 382 and had nothing to do with the massacre of Thessalonica. Peter Brown claims that the law was issued in 390, but that it was unrelated to the massacre of Thessalonica: "The law envisioned notables held in prison, not the innocent population of a whole city". T. Honoré supports 390, but is cautious, saying: "The law is only loosely connected with the massacre". J. F. Mathews argues for 390, explaining that he firmly believes in the connection between these events and the law.

Controversy

There are no contemporaneous accounts. Church historians Sozomen, Theodoret the bishop of Cyrrhus, Socrates of Constantinople and Rufinus wrote the earliest accounts during the fifth century. These are moral accounts emphasizing imperial piety and ecclesial action rather than historical and political details. Further difficulty is created by these events moving into legend in art and literature almost immediately. Doležal explains that yet another problem is created by aspects of these accounts contradicting one another to the point of being mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, most classicists accept at least the basic account of the massacre, although they continue to dispute when it happened, who was responsible for it, what motivated it, and what impact it had on subsequent events.

Theodosius was not in Thessalonica when the massacre occurred. The court was in Milan. Several scholars, such as historian G. W. Bowersock and authors Stephen Williams and Gerard Friell, think that Theodosius ordered the massacre in an excess of "volcanic anger". McLynn also puts all the blame on the Emperor as does the less dependable fifth century historian, Theodoret. Other scholars, such as historians Mark Hebblewhite and N. Q. King, do not agree. Peter Brown points to the empire's established process of decision making, which required the emperor "to listen to his ministers" before acting. There is some indication in the sources Theodosius did listen to his counselors but received bad or misleading advice.

J. F. Matthews argues that the Emperor first tried to punish the city by selective executions. Peter Brown concurs: "As it was, what was probably planned as a selective killing ... got out of hand". Doleźal says Sozomen is very specific in saying that in response to the riot, the soldiers made random arrests in the hippodrome to perform a few public executions as a demonstration of imperial disfavor, but the citizenry objected. Doleźal suggests, "The soldiers, realizing that they were surrounded by angry citizens, perhaps panicked ... and ... forcibly cleared the hippodrome at the cost of several thousands of lives of local inhabitants". McLynn says Theodosius was “unable to impose discipline upon the faraway troops" and covered that failure by taking responsibility for the massacre on himself, declaring he had given the order then countermanded it too late to stop it.

Ambrose, the bishop of Milan and one of Theodosius's many counselors, was away from court. After being informed of events concerning Thessalonica, he wrote Theodosius a letter offering what McLynn calls a different way for the emperor to "save face" and restore his public image. Ambrose urges a semi-public demonstration of penitence, telling the emperor he will not give Theodosius communion until this is done. Wolf Liebeschuetz says "Theodosius duly complied and came to church without his imperial robes, until Christmas, when Ambrose openly admitted him to communion".

Washburn says the image of the mitered prelate braced in the door of the cathedral in Milan blocking Theodosius from entering is a product of the imagination of Theodoret who wrote of the events of 390 "using his own ideology to fill the gaps in the historical record".[Peter Brown also says there was no dramatic encounter at the church door. McLynn states that "the encounter at the church door has long been known as a pious fiction". Wolfe Liebeschuetz says Ambrose advocated a course of action which avoided the kind of public humiliation Theodoret describes, and that is the course Theodosius chose.

According to the early twentieth century historian Henry Smith Williams, history's assessment of Theodosius's character has been stained by the massacre of Thessalonica for centuries. Williams describes Theodosius as a virtuous-minded, courageous man, who was vigorous in pursuit of any important goal, but through contrasting the "inhuman massacre of the people of Thessalonica" with "the generous pardon of the citizens of Antioch" after civil war, Williams also concludes Theodosius was "hasty and choleric". It is only modern scholarship that has begun disputing Theodosius's responsibility for those events.

From the time Edward Gibbon wrote his *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Ambrose's action after the fact has been cited as an example of the church's dominance over the state in Antiquity. Alan Cameron says "the assumption is so widespread it would be superfluous to cite authorities. But there is not a shred of evidence for Ambrose exerting any such influence over Theodosius". Brown says Ambrose was just one among many advisors, and Cameron says there is no evidence Theodosius favored him above anyone else.

By the time of the Thessalonian affair, Ambrose, an aristocrat and former governor, had been a bishop for 16 years, and during his episcopate, had seen the death of three emperors before Theodosius. These produced significant political storms, yet Ambrose held his place using what McLynn calls his "considerable qualities [and] considerable luck" to survive. Theodosius was in his 40s, had been emperor for 11 years, had temporarily settled the Gothic wars, and won a civil war. As a Latin speaking Nicene western leader of the Greek largely Arian East, Boniface Ramsey says he had already left an indelible mark on history.

McLynn asserts that the relationship between Theodosius and Ambrose transformed into myth within a generation of their deaths. He also observes that the documents revealing the relationship between these two formidable men do not show the personal friendship the legends portray. Instead, those documents read more as negotiations between the institutions the men represent: the Roman state and the Italian Church.

Arbogast's Civil War

In 391, Theodosius left his trusted general Arbogast, who had served in the Balkans after Adrianople, to be *magister militum* for the Western emperor Valentinian II, while Theodosius attempted to rule the entire empire from Constantinople. On 15 May 392, Valentinian II died at Vienna in Gaul (Vienne), either by suicide or as part of a plot by Arbogast. Valentinian had quarrelled publicly with Arbogast, and was found hanged in his room. Arbogast announced that this had been a suicide. Stephen Williams asserts that Valentinian's death left Arbogast in "an untenable position". He had to carry on governing without the ability to issue edicts and rescripts from a legitimate acclaimed emperor. Arbogast was unable to assume the role of emperor himself because of his non-Roman background.[99] Instead, on 22 August 392, Arbogast had Valentinian's master of correspondence, Eugenius, proclaimed emperor in the West at Lugdunum.

At least two embassies went to Theodosius to explain events, one of them Christian in make-up, but they received ambivalent replies, and were sent home without achieving their goals. Theodosius raised his second son Honorius to emperor on 23 January 393, implying the illegality of Eugenius's rule. Williams and Friell say that by the spring of 393, the split was complete, and "in April Arbogast and Eugenius at last moved into Italy without resistance". Flavianus, the praetorian prefect of Italy whom Theodosius had appointed, defected to their side. Through early 394, both sides prepared for war.

Theodosius gathered a large army, including the Goths whom he had settled in the eastern empire as *foederati*, and Caucasian and Saracen auxiliaries, and marched against Eugenius. The battle began on 5 September 394, with Theodosius's full frontal assault on Eugenius's forces. Thousands of Goths died, and in Theodosius's camp, the loss of the day decreased morale. It is said by Theodoret that Theodosius was visited by two "heavenly riders all in white" who gave him courage.

The next day, the extremely bloody battle began again and Theodosius's forces were aided by a natural phenomenon known as the Bora, which can produce hurricane-strength winds. The Bora blew directly against the forces of Eugenius and disrupted the line. Eugenius's camp was stormed; Eugenius was captured and soon after executed. According to Socrates Scholasticus, Theodosius defeated Eugenius at the Battle of the Frigidus (the Vipava) on 6 September 394. On 8 September, Arbogast killed himself. According to Socrates, on 1 January 395, Honorius arrived in Mediolanum and a victory celebration was held there. Zosimus records that, at the end of April 394, Theodosius's wife Galla had died while he was away at war.

A number of Christian sources report that Eugenius cultivated the support of the pagan senators by promising to restore the altar of Victory and provide public funds for the maintenance of cults if they would support him and if he won the coming war against Theodosius. Cameron notes that the ultimate source for this is Ambrose's biographer Paulinus the Deacon, whom he argues fabricated the entire narrative and deserves no credence. Historian Michele Renee Salzman explains that "two newly relevant texts – John Chrysostom's Homily 6, *adversus Catharos* (PG 63: 491–492) and the *Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii*, re-dated to the 390s, reinforces the view that religion was not the key ideological element in the events at the time". According to Maijastina Kahlos, Finnish historian and Docent of Latin language and Roman literature at the University of Helsinki, the notion of pagan aristocrats united in a "heroic and cultured resistance" who rose up against the ruthless advance of Christianity in a final battle near Frigidus in 394 is a romantic myth.

DEATH

Theodosius suffered from a disease involving severe edema. He died in Mediolanum (Milan) on 17 January 395, and his body lay in state in the palace there for forty days. His funeral was held in the cathedral on 25 February. Bishop Ambrose delivered a panegyric titled *De obitu Theodosii* in the presence of Stilicho and Honorius in which Ambrose praised the suppression of paganism by Theodosius.

On 8 November 395, his body was transferred to Constantinople, where according to the *Chronicon Paschale* he was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles. He was honored as: *Divus Theodosius*, lit. 'the Divine Theodosius'. He was interred in a porphyry sarcophagus that was described in the 10th century by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in his work *De Ceremoniis*.

MARRIAGE AND ISSUE

Theodosius married twice.

His first wife was Aelia Flaccilla, married in 376 and dead in 386. By her he had three children:

- Arcadius (377 - 408), Roman emperor;
- Aelia Pulcheria (378 - 385);
- Honorius (384 - 423), Roman emperor.

His second wife was Galla, married in 387 and dead in childbirth in 394. By her he had other three children:

- *Gratian (388/389 - ante 395);*
- *Galla Placidia (392/393 - 450), Roman Empress;*
- *John (394), stillbirth.*

HONORIFIC

Theodosius was initially styled "the Great" simply as a way to differentiate him from his grandson Theodosius II. Later, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the honorific was deemed merited due to his promotion of Nicene Christianity.

VENERATION

Theodosius the Great is venerated in Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches:

- *17 January – Eastern Orthodox Church commemoration,*
- *18 January – Ethiopian Church commemorates Theodosius, the righteous emperor,*
- *19 January – Armenian Apostolic Church,*

Emperor (king) Theodosius is commemorated in Armenian Anaphora with saint kings: Abgar, Constantine and Tiridates.

In Eastern Orthodox Church he is commemorated as ktetor of Vatopedi and donator of Vatopedi icon of the Mother of God.

ART PATRONAGE

According to art historian David Wright, art of the era around the year 400 reflects optimism amongst the traditional polytheists. This is likely connected to what Ine Jacobs calls a renaissance of classical styles of art in the Theodosian period (AD 379–395) often referred to in modern scholarship as the *Theodosian renaissance*. The *Forum Tauri* in Constantinople was renamed and redecorated as the Forum of Theodosius, including a column and a triumphal arch in his honour. The *missorium* of Theodosius, the city of Aprodisias's statue of the emperor, the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius, the columns of Theodosius and Arcadius, and the diptych of Probus were all commissioned by the court and reflect a similar renaissance of classicism.

According to Armin Wirsching, two obelisks were shipped by the Romans from Karnak to Alexandria in 13/12 BC. In 357, Constantius II had one (that became known as the Lateran obelisk) shipped to Rome. Wirsching says the Romans had previously watched and learned from the Egyptians how to transport such large heavy objects, so they constructed "a special sea-going version of the Nile vessels ... – a double-ship with three hulls". In 390, Theodosius oversaw the removal of the other to Constantinople.

> *The obelisk with its sculpted base in the former Hippodrome of Constantinople is well known as a rare datable work of Late Antique art. A sixth-century source puts the raising of the obelisk in the year 390, and Greek and Latin epigrams on the plinth (the lower part of the base) credit Theodosius I and the urban prefect Proclus with this feat.*

Linda Safran says that relocating the obelisk was motivated by Theodosius's victory over "the tyrants" (most likely Maximus Magnus and his son Victor). It is now known as the obelisk of Theodosius and still stands in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, the long Roman circus that was, at one time, the centre of Constantinople's public life. Re-erecting the monolith was a challenge for the technology that had been honed in the construction of siege engines.

The obelisk's white marble base is entirely covered with bas-reliefs documenting Theodosius's imperial household and the engineering feat of removing the obelisk to Constantinople. Theodosius and the imperial family are separated from the nobles among the spectators in the imperial box, with a cover over them as a mark of their status. From the perspective of style, it has served as "the key monument in identifying a so-called Theodosian court style, which is usually described as a "renaissance" of earlier Roman classicism".

RELIGIOUS POLICY

Arianism and Orthodoxy

It is traditionally stated that the Arian Controversy, a dispute concerning the nature of the divine trinity, and its accompanying struggles for political influence, started in Alexandria during the reign of Constantine the Great between a presbyter, Arius of Alexandria, and his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria. However, “many of the issues raised by the controversy were under lively discussion *before* Arius and Alexander publicly clashed.” “The views of Arius were such as … to bring into unavoidable prominence a doctrinal crisis which had gradually been gathering. … He was the spark that started the explosion. But in himself he was of *no great significance*.”

It is also traditionally stated that Alexander represented orthodoxy and that, when he died, his successor, Athanasius, became the representative of orthodoxy. In reality, “Nicene apologists … turn ‘Arianism' into a self-conscious sect – as if the boundaries of Catholic identity were firmly and clearly drawn in advance. But the whole history of Arius and of Arianism reminds us that this was not so.” (RW, 83) The Arian Controversy "is not the story of a defence of orthodoxy, but of a *search* for orthodoxy."

Arius asserted that God the Father created the Son. This meant the Son, though still seen as divine, was not equal to the Father, because he had a beginning, and was not eternal. "The controversy had spread from Alexandria into almost all the African regions and was considered a disturbance of the public order by the Roman Empire." (Eusebius of Caesarea in The Life of Constantine)

Constantine had tried to settle the issues at the Council of Nicaea, but as Arnold Hugh Martin Jones states: "The rules laid down at Nicaea were not universally accepted". After the Nicene Creed was formulated in 325, many in the church reacted strongly against the word "*homoousios*" in the Creed, and therefore Councils at Ariminum (Rimini), Nike (southeast of Adrianople), and Constantinople, held in 359–60 by Emperor Constantius II, formulated creeds that were intended to replace or revise the Nicene Creed; in particular, to find alternatives for "homoousios." These councils are no longer regarded as Ecumenical Councils in the tradition of the Church; their creeds, which are at odds with the Nicene Creed, are known as Arian Creeds.

During this time, Athanasius was at the center of the controversy and became the "champion of orthodoxy" after Alexander died. To Athanasius, Arius's interpretation of Jesus's nature (Homoiousian), that the Father and Son are similar but not identical in substance, could not explain how Jesus could accomplish the redemption of humankind which is the foundational principle of Christianity. "According to Athanasius, God had to become human so that humans could become divin ... That led him to conclude that the divine nature in Jesus was identical to that of the Father, and that Father and Son have the same substance" (*homoousios*). Athanasius's teaching was a major influence in the West, especially on Theodosius I.

On 28 February 380, Theodosius, along with Gratian and Valentinian II, issued the Edict of Thessalonica, a decree addressed to the city of Constantinople, determining that only Christians who believed in the consubstantiality of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit could style themselves "catholic" and have their own places of worship officially recognized as "churches"; deviants were labeled heretics and described as "out of their minds and insane".

Recent scholarship has tended to reject former views that the edict was a key step in establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, since it was aimed exclusively at Constantinople and seems to have gone largely unnoticed by contemporaries outside the capital. For example, German ancient historian Karl Leo Noethlichs [de] writes that the Edict of Thessalonica was neither anti-pagan nor antisemitic; it did not declare Christianity to be the official religion of the empire; and it gave no advantage to Christians over other faiths. It is clear from mandates issued in the years after 380 that Theodosius had made no requirement for pagans or Jews to convert to Christianity. Nonetheless, the edict is the first known secular Roman law to positively define a religious orthodoxy.

According to Robinson Thornton, Theodosius began taking steps to repress Arianism immediately after his baptism in 380. On 26 November 380, two days after he had arrived in Constantinople, Theodosius expelled the Homoian bishop, Demophilus of Constantinople, and appointed Meletius patriarch of Antioch, and Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian Fathers from Cappadocia (today in Turkey), patriarch of Constantinople. Theodosius had just been baptized, by bishop Ascholius of Thessalonica, during a severe illness.

In May 381, Theodosius summoned a new ecumenical council at Constantinople to repair the schism between East and West on the basis of Nicene orthodoxy. The council went on to define orthodoxy, including the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as equal to the Father and 'proceeding' from Him. The council also "condemned the Apollonarian and Macedonian heresies, clarified jurisdictions of the bishops according to the civil boundaries of dioceses. and ruled that Constantinople was second in precedence to Rome."

Policy towards Paganism

Theodosius seems to have adopted a cautious policy toward traditional non-Christian cults, reiterating his Christian predecessors' bans on animal sacrifice, divination, and apostasy, while allowing other pagan practices to be performed publicly and temples to remain open. He also voiced his support for the preservation of temple buildings, but nonetheless failed to prevent the damaging of many holy sites, images and objects of piety by Christian zealots, some including even his own officials. Theodosius also turned pagan holidays into workdays, but the festivals associated with them continued. A number of laws against paganism were issued towards the end of his reign, in 391 and 392, but historians have tended to downplay their practical effects and even the emperor's direct role in them. Modern scholars think there is little if any evidence Theodosius pursued an active and sustained policy against the traditional cults.

There is evidence that Theodosius took care to prevent the empire's still substantial pagan population from feeling ill-disposed toward his rule. Following the death in 388 of his praetorian prefect, Cynegius, who had vandalized a number of pagan shrines in the eastern provinces, Theodosius replaced him with a moderate pagan who subsequently moved to protect the temples. During his first official tour of Italy (389–391), the emperor won over the influential pagan lobby in the Roman Senate by appointing its foremost members to important administrative posts. Theodosius also nominated the last pair of pagan consuls in Roman history (Tatianus and Symmachus) in 391.

PERSECUTION OF PAGANS UNDER THEODOSIUS I

The **persecution of pagans under Theodosius I** began in 381, after the first couple of years of his reign as co-emperor in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In the 380s, Theodosius I reiterated the ban of Constantine the Great on animal sacrifices, prohibited haruspicy on animal sacrifice, pioneered the criminalization of magistrates who did not enforce anti-pagan laws, broke up some pagan associations and destroyed pagan temples.

Between 389 and 391, he issued the "Theodosian decrees", which established a practical ban on paganism; visits to the temples were forbidden, the remaining pagan holidays were abolished, the sacred fire in the Temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum was extinguished as the Vestal Virgins were disbanded, and auspices and witchcraft were deemed punishable offenses. Theodosius refused to restore the Altar of Victory in the Senate House, as requested by pagan Senators.

In 392, he became emperor of the whole empire (the last one to be so). From this moment until the end of his reign in 395, while pagans remained outspoken in their demands for toleration, he authorized or participated in the destruction of many temples, holy sites, images and objects of piety throughout the empire in actions by Christians against major pagan sites. He issued a comprehensive law that prohibited any public pagan ritual and was particularly oppressive of Manicheans. He is likely to have suppressed the Ancient Olympic Games, whose last record of celebration is 393.

Initial Tolerance

Theodosius I was relatively tolerant towards pagans in the early part of his reign, since he needed the support of the influential pagan ruling class and the percentage of non-Christians in the general population was still quite large, perhaps 50% overall. This was especially true in the West, where the Church was still largely an urban phenomenon except in North Africa. He voiced his support for the preservation of temples or pagan statues as useful public buildings. He is known to have appointed various pagans to office in the earlier part of his reign. For example, he appointed the pagan Eutolmius Tatianus as the praetorian prefect of Egypt. Theodosius I's relative tolerance for other religions is also indicated by his later order (in 388) for the reconstruction of a Jewish synagogue at Callinicum in Mesopotamia, which had been destroyed by a bishop and his Christian flock.

Theodosius dealt harshly with Arians, heretics, and Christian apostates. Later in his reign, he tried to stamp out the last vestiges of paganism with great severity. However, he did not succeed in this. Even though deprived of state and municipal support, bereft of funds and property, the followers of the old religions continued to survive visibly, though under pressure and weakening, into the early 6th century.

Persecution

His first attempt to inhibit paganism was in 381 when he reiterated Constantine's ban on sacrifice. In 384 he prohibited haruspicy on animal sacrifice, and unlike earlier anti-pagan prohibitions, he made non-enforcement of the law by magistrates a crime. Both Theodosius and Valentinian II formally recognized Maximus in 384. For a time, the pagans enjoyed religious liberty once again, and many distinguished pagans rose to important offices in the state. The fact that the temples continued to be cared for and that pagan festivals continued to be celebrated is indicated by a law of 386, which declared that care for the temples and festivals were the exclusive prerogative of the pagans. This law also confirms the right of the priests to perform the traditional pagan rites of the temples. In 387, Theodosius declared war on Maximus after Maximus had driven Valentinian II out of Italy. Maximus was defeated and executed, and the anti-pagan regulations of Gratian were apparently reinstated by Valentinian II.

In 388 Theodosius sent a prefect to Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor with the aim of breaking up pagan associations and the destruction of their temples. The Serapeum of Alexandria was destroyed during this campaign.

In a series of decrees called the "Theodosian decrees" he progressively declared that those pagan feasts that had not yet been rendered Christian ones were now to be workdays (in 389). In 391, he reiterated the ban of blood sacrifice and decreed "no one is to go to the sanctuaries, walk through the temples, or raise his eyes to statues created by the labor of man" (decree "*Nemo se hostiis polluat*", Codex Theodosianus xvi.10.10). Also in 391, Valentinian II, who was emperor in the West under the aegis of Theodosius, was advised by Ambrose to issue a law that not only prohibited sacrifices but also forbade anyone from visiting the temples. This again caused turbulence in the West. Valentinian II quickly followed this law with a second one, which declared that pagan temples were to be closed, a law that was viewed as practically outlawing paganism.

After the death of Maximus, Valentinian II, under the aegis of Theodosius, once again assumed the office of emperor in the West. Valentinian II, advised by Ambrose, and in spite of pleas from the pagans, refused to restore the Altar of Victory to the Senate House, or their income to the priests and Vestal Virgins. Valentinian was murdered, possibly by agents of Arbogast whom he had tried to dismiss, and Eugenius, a professor of rhetoric, was proclaimed emperor. The ancestral religious rites were once again performed openly and the Altar of Victory was restored. The temples that were thus closed could be declared "abandoned", as Bishop Theophilus I of Alexandria immediately noted in applying for permission to demolish a site and cover it with a Christian church, an act that must have received general sanction, for *mithraea* forming crypts of churches, and temples forming the foundations of 5th century churches appear throughout the former Roman Empire.

By decree in 391, Theodosius ended the subsidies that had still trickled to some remnants of Greco-Roman civic paganism too. In 394 the eternal fire in the Temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum was extinguished, and the Vestal Virgins were disbanded. Taking the auspices and practicing witchcraft were to be punished. When pagan members of the Senate in Rome appealed to him to restore the Altar of Victory in the Senate House, he refused.

The apparent change of policy that resulted in the "Theodosian decrees" has often been credited to the increased influence of Ambrose, bishop of Milan. Only after what is commonly known as the massacre of Thessalonica in 390 was Ambrose able to gain influence with Theodosius. Ambrose accomplished this by excommunicating Theodosius for ordering the massacre, thereby forcing him to obey.

Some modern historians question the consequences of the laws against pagans. The punishment for venerating man-made pagan images was the forfeiture of an individual's house. An individual's punishment for sacrificing in temples or shrines was a fine of twenty-five pounds of gold

In 391 in Alexandria in the wake of the great anti-pagan riots "busts of Serapis which stood in the walls, vestibules, doorways and windows of every house were all torn out and annihilated..., and in their place the sign of the Lord's cross was painted in the doorways, vestibules, windows and walls, and on pillars."

Rome was more pagan than Christian up until the 390s; Gaul, Spain and northern Italy, in all but the urban areas, were pagan, save Milan which remained half pagan.

In 392, Theodosius become Emperor of also the western part of the Roman Empire, the last emperor to rule over both. In the same year he officially began to proscribe the practice of paganism. This was when he authorized the destruction of many temples throughout the empire.

Theodosius participated in actions by Christians against major pagan sites: the destruction of the gigantic Serapeum by soldiers in 391, according to the Christian sources authorized by Theodosius (*extirpium malum*) needs to be seen against a complicated background of less spectacular violence in the city: Eusebius mentions street-fighting in Alexandria between Christians and non-Christians as early as 249, and non-Christians had participated in the struggles for and against Athanasius in 341 and 356. "In 363 they killed Bishop George for repeated acts of pointed outrage, insult, and pillage of the most sacred treasures of the city."[9] In 391 riots broke out between supporters of Theodosius's Imperial Prefect and the supporters of the independent Patriarch of Alexandria as to who really governed in Alexandria; the rioters opposing the patriarch took refuge in the Serapeum and used it as a fortress; when order was restored the prefect ordered it demolished so future rioters could not use it for the same purpose.

In 386, Libanius appealed without success to Theodosius to prevent the destruction of a temple in Edessa, and pleaded for toleration and the preservation of the temples against the ongoing attacks of Christian monks, who he claimed:

> *"hasten to attack the temples with sticks and stones and bars of iron, and in some cases, disdaining these, with hands and feet. Then utter desolation follows, with the stripping of roofs, demolition of walls, the tearing down of statues and the overthrow of altars, and the priests must either keep quiet or die. After demolishing one, they scurry to another, and to a third, and trophy is piled on trophy, in contravention of the law. Such outrages occur even in the cities, but they are most common in the countryside. Many are the foes who perpetrate the separate attacks, but after their countelss crimes this scattered rabble congregates and they are in disgrace unless they have committed the foulest outrage...Temples, Sire, are the soul of the countryside: they mark the beginning of its settlement, and have been passed down through many generations to the men of today. In them the farming communities rest their hopes for husbands, wives, children, for their oxen and the soil they sow and plant. An estate that has suffered so has lost the inspiration of the peasantry together with their hopes, for they believe that their labour will be in vain once they are robbed of the gods who direct their labours to their due end. And if the land no longer enjoys the same care, neither can the yield match what it was before, and, if this be the case, the peasant is the poorer, and the revenue jeopardized."*

Theodosius issued a comprehensive law that prohibited the performance of any type of pagan sacrifice or worship. Theodosius prohibited imperial palace officers and magistrates from honoring their Lares with fire, their Genius with wine, or their Penates with incense. Theodosius also prohibited the practice of all forms of divination, even those forms of divination that were not considered harmful to the welfare of the Emperor, with this wide-ranging law. The laws were particularly hard against the Manicheans who were deprived of the right to make wills or to benefit from them. Manicheans could be sought out by informers, brought to court and in some cases executed. Paganism was now proscribed, a "religio illicita".

In 393, Theodosius was ready to begin his war against Eugenius and Arbogastes. The battle that ensued became, in essence, a battle for the survival of paganism. The defeat of Eugenius by Theodosius in 394 led to the final separation of paganism from the state. Theodosius visited Rome to attempt to convert the pagan members of the Senate. Being unsuccessful in this, he withdrew all state funds that had been set aside for the public performance of pagan rites. From this point forward, state funds would never again be made available for the public performance of pagan rites nor for the maintenance of the pagan temples. Despite this setback on their religion, the pagans remained outspoken in their demands for toleration. Many pagans simply pretended to convert as an obvious instrument of advancement.

Theodosius was not the man to sympathise with the balancing policy of the Edict of Milan. He set himself steadfastly to the work of establishing Nicene Christianity as the privileged religion of the state, of repressing dissident Christians (heretics) and of enacting explicit legal measures to abolish paganism in all its phases.

Examples of the destruction of pagan temples in the late fourth century, as recorded in surviving texts, are:

- *Martin of Tours' attacks on holy sites in Gaul,*
- *The destruction of temples in Syria by Marcellus,*
- *The destruction of temples and images in, and surrounding, Carthage*
- *The ruination of the temple at Delphi,*
- *The desecration of the mystery cult in Eleusis,*
- *The Patriarch Theophilus who seized and destroyed pagan temples in Alexandria,*
- *The levelling of all the temples in Gaza and the wider destruction of holy sites that spread rapidly throughout Egypt.*

This is supplemented in abundance by archaeological evidence in the northern provinces (for which written sources hardly survive) exposing broken and burnt out buildings and hastily buried objects of piety. The leader of the Egyptian monks who participated in the sack of temples replied to the victims who demanded back their sacred icons: "I peacefully removed your gods... there is no such thing as robbery for those who truly possess Christ."

After the last Ancient Olympic Games in 393, it is believed that either Theodosius I, or his grandson Theodosius II in 435, suppressed them. In the official records of the Roman Empire, the reckoning of dates by Olympiads soon came to an end. Subsequently, Theodosius portrayed himself on his coins holding the *labarum*.

According to a Christian historian "Paganism was now dead", though pagans survived and would continue to do so for another three centuries, mainly outside the towns – "rustics chiefly — pagani." Edward Gibbon writes: "The generation that arose in the world after

the promulgation of the Imperial laws was attracted within the pale of the Catholic Church: and so rapid, yet so gentle, was the fall of paganism that only twenty-eight years after the death of Theodosius the faint and minute vestiges were no longer visible to the eye of the legislator." Despite the pleas of many pagans for tolerance, Honorius and Arcadius continued the work of their father by enacting more anti-paganism policies.

Temple Destruction

Contemporary archaeology has found that the area with the most destruction against temples by Christians took place in the territory around Constantinople in the diocese of Orientis (the East) under Theodosius's prefect, Maternus Cynegius, where archaeological digs have discovered several destroyed temples. Theodosius officially supported temple preservation, but Garth Fowden says Cynegius did not limit himself to Theodosius's official policy, but instead, commissioned temple destruction on a wide scale, even employing the military under his command for this purpose. Christopher Haas also says Cynegius oversaw temple closings, the prohibition of sacrifices, and the destruction of temples in Osrhoene, Carrhae, and Beroea.

Earlier scholars believed Cynegius's actions were just part of a tide of violence against temples that continued throughout the 390s. However, recent archaeological discoveries have undermined this view. The archaeological evidence for the violent destruction of temples in the fourth and early fifth centuries around the entire Mediterranean is limited to a handful of sites. Temple destruction is attested to in 43 cases in the written sources, but only 4 of them were confirmed by archaeological evidence. Trombley and MacMullen say part of what creates this discrepancy are details in the historical sources that are commonly ambiguous and unclear. For example, Malalas claimed Constantine destroyed all the temples, then he said Theodosius did, then he said Constantine converted them all to churches. There is no evidence of any desire on the part of the emperor to institute a systematic destruction of temples anywhere in the Theodosian Code, and no evidence in the archaeological record that extensive temple destruction ever took place.

THEODOSIAN DECREES

According to *The Cambridge Ancient History*, the Theodosian Law Code is a set of laws, originally dated from Constantine to Theodosius I, that were gathered together, organized by theme, and reissued throughout the empire between 389 and 391. Jill Harries explains that, in their original forms, these laws were created by different emperors and governors to resolve the issues of a particular place at a particular time. They were not intended as general laws. Local politics and culture had produced divergent attitudes, and as a result, these laws present a series of conflicting opinions: for example, some laws called for the complete destruction of the temples and others for their preservation. French historian of Antiquity, Philippe Fleury, observes that *Ammianus Marcellinus* says this legal complexity produced corruption, forgery of rescripts, falsified appeals, and costly judicial delays.

The Theodosian Law Code has long been one of the principal historical sources for the study of Late Antiquity. Gibbon described the Theodosian decrees, in his *Memoires*, as a work of history rather than jurisprudence. Brown says the language of these laws is uniformly vehement, and penalties are harsh and frequently horrifying, leading some historians, such as Ramsay MacMullen, to see them as a 'declaration of war' on traditional religious practices. It is a common belief the laws marked a turning point in the decline of paganism.

Yet, many contemporary scholars such as Lepelly, Brown and Cameron, question the use of the Code, a legal document, not an actual historical work, for understanding history. One of many problems with using the Theodosian Code as a record of history is described by archaeologists Luke Lavan and Michael Mulryan. They explain that the Code can be seen to document "Christian ambition" but not historic reality. The overtly violent fourth century that one would expect to find from taking the laws at face value is not supported by archaeological evidence from around the Mediterranean.

The Codex Theodosianus

The ***Codex Theodosianus*** ("Theodosian Code") is a compilation of the laws of the Roman Empire under the Christian emperors since 312. A commission was established by Emperor Theodosius II and his co-emperor Valentinian III on 26 March 429 and the compilation was published by a constitution of 15 February 438. It went into force in the eastern and western parts of the empire on 1 January 439. The original text of the codex is also found in the *Breviary of Alaric* (also called *Lex Romana Visigothorum*), promulgated on 2 February 506 by Visigoth King Alaric II.

On 26 March 429, Emperor Theodosius II announced to the Senate of Constantinople his intention to form a committee to codify all of the laws (*leges*, singular *lex*) from the reign of Constantine up to Theodosius II and Valentinian III. The laws in the code span from 312 to 438, so by 438 the "volume of imperial law had become unmanageable". Twenty-two scholars, working in two teams, worked for nine years starting in 429 to assemble what was to become the *Theodosian Code*. The chief overseer of the work was Antiochus Chuzon, a lawyer and a prefect and consul from Antioch.

Their product was a collection of 16 books containing more than 2,500 constitutions issued between 313 and 437, while, at the same time, omitting obsolete provisions and superfluous phrases, and making additions, emendations, and alterations. John F. Matthews illustrated the importance of Theodosius' code when he said, "the Theodosian Code was the first occasion since the Twelve Tables on which a Roman government had attempted by public authority to collect and publish its *leges*." The code covers political, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious subjects of the 4th and 5th centuries in the Roman Empire.

A collection of imperial enactments called the *Codex Gregorianus* had been written in c. 291–4 and the *Codex Hermogenianus*, a limited collection of rescripts from c. 295, was published. The Sirmondian Constitutions may also represent a small-scale collection of imperial laws. However, Theodosius desired to create a more comprehensive code that would provide greater insight into law during the later empire (321–429). Peter Stein states, "Theodosius was perturbed at the low state of legal skill in his empire of the East." He started a school of law at Constantinople. In 429, he assigned a commission to collect all imperial constitutions since the time of Constantine.

While gathering the vast amount of material, editors often had multiple copies of the same law. In addition to this, the source material the editors were drawing upon changed over time. Clifford Ando notes that according to Matthews, the editors "displayed a reliance on western provincial sources through the late 4th century and on central, eastern archives thereafter."

After 6 years, an initial version was finished in 435 but was not published. Instead, it was improved upon and expanded and finally finished in 438 and taken to the Senate in Rome and Constantinople. Matthews believes that the two attempts are not the result of a failed first attempt; however, the second attempt shows "reiteration and refinement of the original goals at a new stage in the editorial process". Others have put forth alternate theories to explain the lengthy editorial process and two different commissions. Boudewijn Sirks believes that "the code was compiled from imperial copy books found at Constantinople, Rome, or Ravenna, supplemented by material at a few private collections, and that the delays were caused by such problems as verifying the accuracy of the text and improving the legal coherence of the work."

The tone of the work reflected the rhetorical training that the drafters had received, and Averil Cameron has described it as "verbose, moralizing and pretentious".

The code was written in Latin and referred explicitly to the two capitals of Constantinople (*Constantinopolitana*) and Rome (*Roma*). It was also concerned with the imposition of orthodoxy – the Arian controversy was ongoing – within the Christian religion and contains 65 decrees directed at heretics.

Initially, Theodosius attempted to commission *leges generales* beginning with Constantine as a supplement for the *Codex Gregorianus* and the *Codex Hermogenianus*. He intended to supplement the legal codes with the opinions and writings of ancient Roman jurists, much like the digest found later in *Justinian's Code*. But the task proved too great, and in 435, it was decided to concentrate solely on the laws from Constantine to the time of writing.

Matthews observes, "The Theodosian Code does, however, differ from the work of Justinian (except the Novellae), in that it was largely based not on existing juristic writings and collections of texts, but on primary sources that had never before been brought together." Justinian's Code, published about 100 years later, comprised both *ius*, "law as an interpretive discipline", and *leges*, "the primary legislation upon which the interpretation was based". While the first part, or codex, of Justinian's *Corpus Civilis Juris* contained 12 books of *constitutions*, or imperial laws, the second and third parts, the *digest* and the *Institutiones*, contained the *ius* of Classical Roman jurists and the *Institutes* of Gaius.

While the Theodosian Code may seem to lack a personal facet due to the absence of judicial reviews, upon further review, the legal code gives insight into Theodosius' motives behind the codification. Lenski quotes Matthews as noting that the "imperial constitutions represented not only prescriptive legal formulas but also descriptive pronouncements of an emperor's moral and ideological principles".

Apart from clearing up confusion and creating a single, simplified, and supersedent code, Theodosius II also attempted to solidify Christianity as the Empire's official religion after it had been decriminalised under Galerius' rule and promoted under Constantine's. In his *City of God*, St. Augustine praised Theodosius the Great, Theodosius II's grandfather, who shared his faith and devotion, as "a Christian ruler whose piety was expressed by the laws he had issued in favor of the Catholic Church".

The *Codex Theodosianus* is, for example, explicit in ordering that all actions at law should cease during Holy Week, and the doors of all courts of law be closed during those 15 days (1. ii. tit. viii.). It also instituted laws punishing homosexuality, which represented a departure from policy under the period of the Roman Republic, under which homosexuality was tolerated and perhaps mocked but was not illegal.

The first laws granting tax exemption to the church appear in the *Codex* and are credited to Constantine and his son Constantius II. These laws specify land owned by clergy, their family members, and churches were exempt from compulsory service and tax payments with the exception of land personally owned by the clerics.

Books 1-5 lack the manuscript support available for books 6–16. The first five books of the surviving Codex draw largely from two other manuscripts. The Turin manuscript, or "T", consists of 43 largely discontinuous folios. The second manuscript is the *Breviary of Alaric*, and a good part of the *Breviarium* that is included in book 1 contains the original text of the respective part of the original codex.

The latter part of the Codex, books 6–16, also drew largely from two texts. Books 6–8 of the Codex were preserved in the text of a document known as *Parsinus* 9643. The document circulated in early medieval French libraries, as well as the other formative document for the latter part of the code, a document held in the Vatican (Vat. Reg. 886), also known as "V". Scholars consider this section to have been transmitted completely.

The reference edition of the Codex Theodosianus is:

- Mommsen-Meyer, *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges Novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, Berlin, Weidemann, 1905.
- *Codex Theodosianus* (in Latin). Genève: Johann Arnold. 1586.
- Iacobus Gothofredus (1616). *De statu paganorum sub christianis imperatoribus: seu commentarius ad titulum X de paganis libri XVI codicis Theodosiani* (in Latin). Heidelberg: Gotthard Vögelin.

The Theodosian Code was translated into English, with annotations, in 1952 by Clyde Pharr, Theresa Sherrer Davidson, and others. This translation was very favorably received by scholars.

Edict of Thessalonica

The **Edict of Thessalonica** (Greek: Διάταγμα της Θεσσαλονίκης), issued on 27 February AD 380 by Theodosius I, made Nicene Christianity the state church of the Roman Empire. It condemned other Christian creeds such as Arianism as heresies of "foolish madmen", and authorized their punishment.

This edict, addressed to the inhabitants of Constantinople whom Theodosius wished to pacify in order to make the city his imperial residence, constitutes the first known secular law which includes in its preamble a clear definition of what a Christian Roman ruler considers as religious orthodoxy, opening the way of repression against dissidents qualified as "heretics". The Edict of Thessalonica was subsequently incorporated into Book XVI of the Theodosian Code and was the milestone of the official Christianization of the Roman Empire.

In 313 the emperor Constantine I, together with his eastern counterpart Licinius, issued the Edict of Milan, which granted religious toleration and freedom for persecuted Christians. By 325 Arianism, a school of christology which contended that Christ did not possess the divine essence of the Father but was rather a primordial creation and an entity subordinate to God, had become sufficiently widespread and controversial in Early Christianity that Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in an attempt to end the controversy by establishing an empire-wide, i.e., "ecumenical" orthodoxy. The council produced the original text of the Nicene Creed, which rejected the Arian confession and upheld that Christ is "true God" and "of one essence with the Father." However, the strife within the Church did not end with Nicaea, and the Nicene credal formulation remained contentious even among anti-Arian churchmen. Constantine, while urging tolerance, began to think that he had come down on the wrong side, and that the Nicenes—with their fervid, reciprocal persecution of Arians—were actually perpetuating strife within the Church. Constantine was not baptized until he was near death (337), choosing a bishop moderately sympathetic to Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, to perform the baptism.

Constantius II, Constantine's son and successor in the eastern empire, was partial to the Arian party, and even exiled pro-Nicene bishops. Constantius' successor Julian (later called "The Apostate" by Christian writers) was the only emperor after the conversion of Constantine to reject Christianity, attempting to fragment the Church and erode its influence by encouraging a revival of religious diversity, calling himself a "Hellene" and supporting forms of Hellenistic religion. He championed the traditional religious *cultus* of Rome as well as Judaism, and furthermore declared toleration for all the various unorthodox Christian sects and schismatic movements. Julian's successor Jovian, a Christian, reigned for only eight months and never entered the city of Constantinople. He was succeeded in the east by Valens, an Arian.

By 379, when Valens was succeeded by Theodosius I, Arianism was widespread in the eastern half of the Empire, while the west had remained steadfastly Nicene. Theodosius, who had been born in Hispania, was himself a Nicene Christian and very devout. In August, his western counterpart Gratian promoted persecution of heretics in the west.

The Edict of Thessalonica was jointly issued by Theodosius I, emperor of the East, Gratian, emperor of the West, and Gratian's junior co-ruler Valentinian II, on 27 February 380. The edict came after Theodosius had been baptized by the bishop Ascholius of Thessalonica upon suffering a severe illness in that city.

> IMPPP. GR(ATI)ANUS, VAL(ENTINI)ANUS ET THE(O)D(OSIUS) AAA. EDICTUM AD POPULUM VRB(IS) CONSTANTINOP(OLITANAE).
>
> **Cunctos populos**, quos clementiae nostrae regit temperamentum, in tali volumus religione versari, quam divinum Petrum apostolum tradidisse Romanis religio usque ad nunc ab ipso insinuata declarat quamque pontificem Damasum sequi claret et Petrum Aleksandriae episcopum virum apostolicae sanctitatis, hoc est, ut secundum apostolicam disciplinam evangelicamque doctrinam patris et filii et spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub pari maiestate et sub pia trinitate credamus. Hanc legem sequentes Christianorum catholicorum nomen iubemus amplecti, reliquos vero dementes vesanosque iudicantes haeretici dogmatis infamiam sustinere ‘nec conciliabula eorum ecclesiarum nomen accipere’, divina primum vindicta, post etiam motus nostri, quem ex caelesti arbitro sumpserimus, ultione plectendos.
>
> DAT. III Kal. Mar. THESSAL(ONICAE) GR(ATI)ANO A. V ET THEOD(OSIO) A. I CONSS.
>
> EMPERORS GRATIAN, VALENTINIAN AND THEODOSIUS *AUGUSTI*. EDICT TO THE PEOPLE OF CONSTANTINOPLE. It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue to profess that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it has been preserved by faithful tradition, and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the one deity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We order the followers of this law to embrace the name of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of Heaven we shall decide to inflict.
>
> GIVEN IN THESSALONICA ON THE THIRD DAY FROM THE CALENDS OF MARCH, DURING THE FIFTH CONSULATE OF GRATIAN AUGUSTUS AND FIRST OF THEODOSIUS AUGUSTUS
>
> —***Codex Theodosianus*, xvi.1.2**

END OF PAGANISM

The picture of Theodosius as "the most pious emperor", who presided over the end of paganism through the aggressive application of law and coercion – a view which R. Malcolm Errington says "has dominated the European historical tradition almost to this day" – was first written by Theodoret who, in Errington's view, had a habit of ignoring facts and cherry picking. In the centuries following his death, Theodosius gained a reputation as the champion of orthodoxy and the vanquisher of paganism, but modern historians see this as a later interpretation of history by Christian writers rather than actual history.

An increase in the variety and abundance of sources has brought about the reinterpretation of religion of this era. According to Salzman: "Although the debate on the death of paganism continues, scholars ...by and large, concur that the once dominant notion of overt pagan-Christian religious conflict cannot fully explain the texts and artifacts or the social, religious, and political realities of Late Antique Rome".

Scholars agree that Theodosius gathered copious legislation on religious subjects, and that he continued the practices of his predecessors, prohibiting sacrifices with the intent of divining the future in December of 380, issuing a decree against heretics on 10 January 381, and an edict against Manichaeism in May of that same year. Theodosius convened the First Council of Constantinople, the second ecumenical council after Constantine's First Council of Nicaea in 325; and the Constantinopolitan council which ended on 9 July. What is important about this, according to Errington, is how much this 'copious legislation' was applied and used, which would show how dependable it is as a reflection of actual history.

Brown asserts that Christians still comprised a minority of the overall population, and local authorities were still mostly pagan and lax in imposing anti-pagan laws; even Christian bishops frequently obstructed their application. Harries says, "The contents of the Code provide details from the canvas but are an unreliable guide, in isolation, to the character of the picture as a whole". Previously undervalued similarities in language, society, religion, and the arts, as well as current archaeological research, indicate paganism slowly declined, and that it was not forcefully overthrown by Theodosius I in the fourth century.

Maijastina Kahlos writes that the fourth century Roman empire contained a wide variety of religions, cults, sects, beliefs and practices and they all generally co-existed without incident. Coexistence did occasionally lead to violence, but such outbreaks were relatively infrequent and localized. Jan N. Bremmer says that "religious violence in Late Antiquity is mostly restricted to violent rhetoric: 'in Antiquity, not all religious violence was that religious, and not all religious violence was that violent'".

The Christian church believed that victory over "false gods" had begun with Jesus and was completed through the conversion of Constantine; it was a victory that took place in heaven, rather than on earth, since Christians were only about 15–18% of the empire's population in the early 300s. Brown indicates that, as a result of this "triumphalism," paganism was seen as vanquished, and Salzman adds that judging by the sheer number of laws, heresy was a much higher priority than paganism for Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Lavan says Christian writers gave the narrative of victory high visibility, but that it does not necessarily correlate to actual conversion rates. There are many signs that a healthy paganism continued into the fifth century, and in some places, into the sixth and beyond. According to Brown, Christians objected to anything that called the triumphal narrative into question, and that included the mistreatment of non-Christians. Archaeology indicates that in most regions away from the imperial court, the end of paganism was both gradual and untraumatic. The *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* says that "Torture and murder were not the inevitable result of the rise of Christianity." Instead, there was fluidity in the boundaries between the communities and "coexistence with a competitive spirit." Brown says that "In most areas, polytheists were not molested, and, apart from a few ugly incidents of local violence, Jewish communities also enjoyed a century of stable, even privileged, existence."

While conceding that Theodosius's reign may have been a watershed in the decline of the old religions, Cameron downplays the role of the emperor's 'copious legislation' as limited in effect, and writes that Theodosius did 'certainly not' ban paganism. In his 2020 biography of Theodosius, Mark Hebblewhite concludes that Theodosius never saw or advertised himself as a destroyer of the old cults; rather, the emperor's efforts to promote Christianity were cautious, 'targeted, tactical, and nuanced', and intended to prevent political instability and religious discord.

FIRST COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The First Council of Constantinople (Latin: *Concilium Constantinopolitanum*; Ancient Greek: Σύνοδος τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως) was a council of Christian bishops convened in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) in AD 381 by the Roman Emperor Theodosius I. This second ecumenical council, an effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom, except for the Western Church, confirmed the Nicene Creed, expanding the doctrine thereof to produce the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, and dealt with sundry other matters. It met from May to July 381 in the Church of Hagia Irene and was affirmed as ecumenical in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon for Chalcedonian Christianity and the Second Council of Ephesus for the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Background

When Theodosius ascended to the imperial throne in 380, he began on a campaign to bring the Eastern Church back to Nicene Christianity. Theodosius wanted to further unify the entire empire behind the orthodox position and decided to convene a church council to resolve matters of faith and discipline. Gregory Nazianzus was of similar mind, wishing to unify Christianity. In the spring of 381 they convened the second ecumenical council in Constantinople.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 had not ended the Arian controversy which it had been called to clarify. Arius and his sympathizers, e.g. Eusebius of Nicomedia, were admitted back into the church after ostensibly accepting the Nicene creed. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, the most vocal opponent of Arianism, was ultimately exiled through the machinations of Eusebius of Nicomedia. After the death of Constantine I in 337 and the accession of his Arian-leaning son Constantius II, open discussion of replacing the Nicene creed itself began. Up until about 360, theological debates mainly dealt with the divinity of the Son, the second person of the Trinity. However, because the Council of Nicaea had not clarified the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, it became a topic of debate. The Macedonians denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This was also known as Pneumatomachianism.

Nicene Christianity also had its defenders: apart from Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers' Trinitarian discourse was influential in the council at Constantinople. Apollinaris of Laodicea, another pro-Nicene theologian, proved controversial. Possibly in an over-reaction to Arianism and its teaching that Christ was created and not eternal, he taught that Christ consisted of a human body and a divine mind, rejecting the belief that Christ had a complete human nature, including a human mind. He was charged with confounding the persons of the Godhead, and with giving in to the heretical ways of Sabellius. Basil of Caesarea accused him of abandoning the literal sense of the scripture, and taking up wholly with the allegorical sense. His views were condemned in a Synod at Alexandria, under Athanasius of Alexandria, in 362, and later subdivided into several different heresies, the main ones of which were the Polemians and the Antidicomarianites.

Theodosius' strong commitment to Nicene Christianity involved a calculated risk because Constantinople, the imperial capital of the Eastern Empire, was solidly Arian. To complicate matters, the two leading factions of Nicene Christianity in the East, the Alexandrians and the supporters of Meletius in Antioch, were "bitterly divided ... almost to the point of complete animosity".

The bishops of Alexandria and Rome had worked over a number of years to keep the see of Constantinople from stabilizing. Thus, when Gregory was selected as a candidate for the bishopric of Constantinople, both Alexandria and Rome opposed him because of his Antiochene background.

The incumbent bishop of Constantinople was Demophilus, a Homoian Arian. On his accession to the imperial throne, Theodosius offered to confirm Demophilus as bishop of the imperial city on the condition of accepting the Nicene Creed; however, Demophilus refused to abandon his Arian beliefs, and was immediately ordered to give up his churches and leave Constantinople. After forty years under the control of Arian bishops, the churches of Constantinople were now restored to those who subscribed to the Nicene Creed; Arians were also ejected from the churches of other cities in the Eastern Roman Empire thus re-establishing Christian orthodoxy in the East.

There ensued a contest to control the newly recovered see. A group led by Maximus the Cynic gained the support of Patriarch Peter of Alexandria by playing on his jealousy of the newly created see of Constantinople. They conceived a plan to install a cleric subservient to Peter as bishop of Constantinople so that Alexandria would retain the leadership of the Eastern Churches. Many commentators characterize Maximus as having been proud, arrogant and ambitious. However, it is not clear the extent to which Maximus sought this position due to his own ambition or if he was merely a pawn in the power struggle. In any event, the plot was set into motion when, on a night when Gregory was confined by illness, the conspirators burst into the cathedral and commenced the consecration of Maximus as bishop of Constantinople. They had seated Maximus on the archiepiscopal throne and had just begun shearing away his long curls when the day dawned. The news of what was transpiring quickly spread and everybody rushed to the church. The magistrates appeared with their officers; Maximus and his consecrators were driven from the cathedral, and ultimately completed the tonsure in the tenement of a flute-player.

The news of the brazen attempt to usurp the episcopal throne aroused the anger of the local populace among whom Gregory was popular. Maximus withdrew to Thessalonica to lay his cause before the emperor but met with a cold reception there. Theodosius committed the matter to Ascholius, the much respected bishop of Thessalonica, charging him to seek the counsel of Pope Damasus I.

Damasus' response repudiated Maximus summarily and advised Theodosius to summon a council of bishops for the purpose of settling various church issues such as the schism in Antioch and the consecration of a proper bishop for the see of Constantinople. Damasus condemned the translation of bishops from one see to another and urged Theodosius to "take care that a bishop who is above reproach is chosen for that see."

Proceedings

Thirty-six Pneumatomachians arrived but were denied admission to the council when they refused to accept the Nicene creed.

Since Peter, the Pope of Alexandria, was not present, the presidency over the council was given to Meletius as Patriarch of Antioch. The first order of business before the council was to declare the clandestine consecration of Maximus invalid, and to confirm Theodosius' installation of Gregory Nazianzus as Archbishop of Constantinople. When Meletius died shortly after the opening of the council, Gregory was selected to lead the council.

The Egyptian and Macedonian bishops who had supported Maximus's ordination arrived late for the council. Once there, they refused to recognise Gregory's position as head of the church of Constantinople, arguing that his transfer from the See of Sasima was canonically illegitimate because one of the canons of the Council of Nicaea had forbidden bishops to transfer from their sees.

McGuckin describes Gregory as physically exhausted and worried that he was losing the confidence of the bishops and the emperor. Ayres goes further and asserts that Gregory quickly made himself unpopular among the bishops by supporting the losing candidate for the bishopric of Antioch and vehemently opposing any compromise with the Homoiousians.

Rather than press his case and risk further division, Gregory decided to resign his office: "Let me be as the Prophet Jonah! I was responsible for the storm, but I would sacrifice myself for the salvation of the ship. Seize me and throw me... I was not happy when I ascended the throne, and gladly would I descend it." He shocked the council with his surprise resignation and then delivered a

dramatic speech to Theodosius asking to be released from his offices. The emperor, moved by his words, applauded, commended his labor, and granted his resignation. The council asked him to appear once more for a farewell ritual and celebratory orations. Gregory used this occasion to deliver a final address (Or. 42) and then departed.

Nectarius, an unbaptized civil official, was chosen to succeed Gregory as president of the council.

Canons

Seven canons, four of these doctrinal canons and three disciplinary canons, are attributed to the council and accepted by both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches; the Roman Catholic Church accepts only the first four because only the first four appear in the oldest copies and there is evidence that the last three were later additions.

- The first canon is an important dogmatic condemnation of all shades of Arianism, and also of Macedonianism and Apollinarianism.

- The second canon renewed the Nicene legislation imposing upon the bishops the observance of diocesan and patriarchal limits.

- The third canon reads:

> *The Bishop of Constantinople, however, shall have the prerogative of honour after the Bishop of Rome because Constantinople is New Rome.*

- The fourth canon decreed the consecration of Maximus as Bishop of Constantinople to be invalid, declaring "that [Maximus] neither was nor is a bishop, nor are they who have been ordained by him in any rank of the clergy". This canon was directed not only against Maximus, but also against the Egyptian bishops who had conspired to consecrate him clandestinely at Constantinople, and against any subordinate ecclesiastics that he might have ordained in Egypt.

- The fifth canon might actually have been passed the next year, 382, and is in regard to a *Tome* of the Western bishops, perhaps that of Pope Damasus I.

- The sixth canon might belong to the year 382 as well and was subsequently passed at the Quinisext Council as canon 95. It limits the ability to accuse bishops of wrongdoing.

- The seventh canon regards procedures for receiving certain heretics into the church.

Dispute Concering the Third Canon

The third canon was a first step in the rising importance of the new imperial capital, just fifty years old, and was notable in that it demoted the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria. Jerusalem, as the site of the first church, retained its place of honor. It originally did not elicit controversy, as the Papal legate Paschasinus and a partisan of his, Diogenes of Cyzicus, reference the canon as being in force during the first session of the Council of Chalcedon. According to Eusebius of Dorlyeum, another Papal ally during Chalcedon, "I myself read this very canon [Canon 3] to the most holy pope in Rome in the presence of the clerics of Constantinople and he accepted it."

Nevertheless, controversy has ensued since then. The status of the canon became questioned after disputes over Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon erupted. Pope Leo the Great, declared that this canon had never been submitted to Rome and that their lessened honor was a violation of the Nicene council order. Throughout the next several centuries, the Western Church asserted that the Bishop of Rome had supreme authority, and by the time of the Great Schism the Roman Catholic Church based its claim to supremacy on the succession of St. Peter. At the Fourth Council of Constantinople (869), the Roman legates asserted the place of the bishop of Rome's honor over the bishop of Constantinople's. After the Great Schism of 1054, in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council declared, in its fifth canon, that the Roman Church "by the will of God holds over all others pre-eminence of ordinary power as the mother and mistress of all the faithful". Roman supremacy over the whole world was formally claimed by the new Latin patriarch. The Roman correctores of Gratian, insert the words: "canon hic ex iis est quos apostolica Romana sedes a principio et longo post tempore non recipit" ("this canon is one of those that the Apostolic See of Rome has not accepted from the beginning and ever since").

Later on, Baronius asserted that the third canon was not authentic, not in fact decreed by the council. Contrarily, roughly contemporaneous Greeks maintained that it did not declare supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, but the primacy; "the first among equals", similar to how they today view the Bishop of Constantinople.

Aftermath

It has been asserted by many that a synod was held by Pope Damasus I in the following year (382) which opposed the disciplinary canons of the Council of Constantinople, especially the third canon which placed Constantinople above Alexandria and Antioch. The synod protested against this raising of the bishop of the new imperial capital, just fifty years old, to a status higher than that of the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch, and stated that the primacy of the Roman see had not been established by a gathering of bishops but rather by Christ himself. Thomas Shahan says that, according to Photius too, Pope Damasus approved the council, but he adds that, if any part of the council were approved by this pope, it could have been only its revision of the Nicene Creed, as was the case also when Gregory the Great recognized it as one of the four general councils, but only in its dogmatic utterances.

Traditionally, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has been associated with the Council of Constantinople (381). It is roughly theologically equivalent to the Nicene Creed, but includes two additional articles: an article on the Holy Spirit—describing Him as "the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, and Who spoke through the prophets"—and an article about the church, baptism, and the resurrection of the dead. (For the full text of both creeds, see Comparison between Creed of 325 and Creed of 381.)

However, scholars are not agreed on the connection between the Council of Constantinople and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Some modern scholars believe that this creed, or something close to it, was stated by the bishops at Constantinople, but not promulgated as an official act of the council. Scholars also dispute whether this creed was simply an expansion of the Creed of Nicaea, or whether it was an expansion of another traditional creed similar but not identical to the one from Nicaea. In 451, the Council of Chalcedon referred to this creed as "the creed ... of the 150 saintly fathers assembled in Constantinople", indicating that this creed was associated with Constantinople (381) no later than 451.

This council condemned Arianism which began to die out with further condemnations at a council of Aquileia by Ambrose of Milan in 381. With the discussion of Trinitarian doctrine now developed, the focus of discussion changed to Christology, which would be the topic of the Council of Ephesus of 431 and the Council of Chalcedon of 451.

David Eastman cites the First Council of Constantinople as another example of the waning influence of Rome over the East. He notes that all three of the presiding bishops came from the East. Damasus had considered both Meletius and Gregory to be illegitimate bishops of their respective sees and yet, as Eastman and others point out, the Eastern bishops paid no heed to his opinions in this regard.

The First Council of Constantinople (381) was the first appearance of the term 'New Rome' in connection to Constantinople. The term was employed as the grounds for giving the relatively young church of Constantinople precedence over Alexandria and Antioch ('because it is the New Rome'). Later, after the Council of Ephesus, influence would shift to Alexandria from both Rome and Constantinople, which prompted Rome to intervene with its Council of Chalcedon.

Liturgical Commemorations

The 150 individuals at the council are commemorated in the Calendar of saints of the Armenian Apostolic Church on February 17.

The Eastern Orthodox Church in some places (e.g. Russia) has a feast day for the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils on the Sunday nearest to July 13 and on May 22.